

SHUE MURDER STORY

The Greenbrier Ghost story has been told unnumbered times. It has appeared in local newspapers. It has been printed in many detective story magazines. It has been told in mystery quarterlies. It has been included in many hard-cover anthologies. And how many thousands of times has the sobering tale been passed from teller to listener by word of mouth?

Was it a ghost? Or, was it all a dream had by a bereaved mother who refused to believe that her beloved daughter had died a natural death? Science may never know the answer. But a jury of Greenbrier dwellers and a respected judge heard testimony which convicted a man of murder and sent him to prison for life. The ever-growing testimony began, however, when a supernatural entity--or a dream--came to Mrs. Mary J. Heaster, who caused the authorities to act in the bizarre case.

Herewith is the reported sequence of events in one of the strangest cases ever to come before the American bar: The time was the autumn of 1896. A strong and hearty blacksmith named Edward S. Shue had recently moved from Pocahontas County into Greenbrier County, and had begun working in a blacksmith shop owned by James Crookshanks and located a few miles from Lewisburg.

Shue was 35 at the time, having been born in 1861, at Mount Solin, Virginia. Although the brawny newcomer had already had two wives, one divorced and the other dead, he attracted the eye of the pretty young Zona Heaster. After a whirlwind courtship lasting only a few weeks, the two were married. The marriage took place in November in the Methodist church at Livesay's Mill.

The couple moved to their home, which was located six miles west of Lewisburg on what is now Route 60. The house is now owned and occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Clyde Goodwin, and sits on the right of the highway, a quarter mile past Route 19.

Zona, in the role of new bride, became known as an excellent cook and housekeeper. Things seemed to go well until Christmas, but a few days later the young Mrs. Shue fell ill. She was treated for several weeks by Doctor C. M. Knapp, and cared for by her seemingly devoted husband. Approximately a month passed. During this time she seems to have regained her health somewhat, for she was able to cook their meals.

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Then, on the morning of January 22, 1897, Shue went to the home of a Negro woman affectionately called Aunt Martha Jones and asked that her young son, Anderson, go do some chores for Zona, who--said her husband--was too ill to do the work herself. Anderson was busy at the time, but his mother promised that he would go to the Shue residence later. The blacksmith came back after a period of time and urged that Anderson do the chores as soon as possible.

Finally, at one o'clock Anderson went to the Shue house. The place was closed. The suddenly-frightened youth saw a trail of blood on the porch, and getting no response to his repeated knocking on the door, he cautiously opened the unlatched entrance and slowly walked through the kitchen, still following the trail of blood, which led him into the dining room. Here on the floor lay the cold stiff body of Zona Heaster Shue.

When the terrified boy rushed home to tell his mother of his discovery, she went to the Shue home. Anderson ran down the road to the blacksmith shop where Shue was at work, and told him the news. Shue gave a loud outcry and rushed homeward. The lad ran then to bring Doctor Knapp.

When the doctor arrived to examine the young woman, he found that the husband had placed her on a bed, had dressed her in an outfit complete with a high stiff collar, and had then wrapped a scarf around her neck. Shue held her head continuously, until the doctor completed the examination and pronounced Zona dead of a heart attack.

Next morning Zona's body was taken to the residence of her mother. The husband allowed no one to come near the home-made casket, but stood guard at the head of the box. He had placed a sheet and other materials on either side of the corpse's head. The burial was made on a dreary Monday, in the little family plot on the side of a bleak mountain. Zona Heaster Shue was dead. She was buried. But events were building toward a new climax.

Mary Heaster never did believe that Zona had died a natural death. Too many things seemed to point to a more horrible fate. The mother prayed for days after the funeral, asking God to give her the true answer. Then one night near 12 o'clock she saw Zona standing by the bed...

Mary Heaster's neighbors were kind but sceptical, when she told the story of dead Zona's return. Most believed the mother's overwrought condition had brought on a strange wished-for dream.

She was a woman not easily discouraged, however, and she was determined to find out whether Shue had murdered Zona. Finally, a brother-in-law, Johnson Heaster, was convinced to the point where he went to question Edward Shue. The answers made the uncle firmly believe foul play had been done.

Mary and Johnson Heaster went to Lewisburg and talked with Prosecuting Attorney John A. Preston, who also became convinced of foul play in the case. The wheels of Justice began to grind.

Preston began his investigation by questioning Doctor Knapp, who admitted that his verdict of heart failure could have been wrong. An autopsy was decided upon. Next day Attorney Preston and Doctor Knapp journeyed to Livesay's Mill to talk with Shue, who was legally ordered to go with them to the grave. Aunt Martha Jones and Anderson also went along.

They dug up Zona's body and carried it to a one-room school house nearby. There the autopsy confirmed she had died of a broken neck.

Shue was charged with murder and was lodged in the County Jail at Lewisburg, to await the June term of the Greenbrier County Circuit Court. The prisoner obtained two lawyers to defend him, Doctor William Rucker and James Gardner, the latter being one of the first Negro lawyers to practice in West Virginia.

In a packed courtroom, the last day of June, Edward Shue went on trial for murder. Attorney Preston, in his opening told the jury that the case of West Virginia against Shue was circumstantial, then added that evidence would soon unfold of a type never before presented in a modern courtroom.

Doctor Knapp testified that he originally rendered a verdict of heart failure only after Shue had refused to let the medical man examine Zona's head. The binding scarf was also recalled.

Anderson Jones told of Shue's persistent efforts to get the boy to go do the chores for Zona. Anderson described how he found the body.

Other witnesses recalled Shue was the only person seen or known to be at his home the morning of the tragedy. Witnesses also recalled that Zona's head seemed loose at the neck and moved too freely when unsupported. They mentioned the supporting clothes placed beside her head in the coffin.

All testimony, however, was a prelude to that of Mary Heaster. The rest of the evidence had indeed been circumstantial. She took the stand and quietly related her experience with the vision of Zona. The defendant's lawyers tried to make her say that the whole thing was a series of dreams. Mary Heaster denied this, asserting that she was wide awake each time the dead Zona appeared.

THE GREENBRIER GHOST
Shue Murder Story

THE FIRST NIGHT

MARY J. HEASTER (Mother of Zona Heaster Shue) is lying in bed, praying that her dead daughter Zona come and reveal the cause of the pretty girl's recent sudden death. The praying has been going on for an hour. All at once the mother turns and sees her dead daughter standing beside the bed. The mother puts out her hand..

ZONA..... stands looking at her mother for a time, hesitates as if about to speak, and then disappears.

THE SECOND NIGHT

MARY J. HEASTER is again praying for the dead girl to reappear and reveal the manner of death. Suddenly Zona appears and stands near the mother.

ZONA..... talks with her mother, Mary, and begins telling of the action leading to the grisly ending. She does not finish the story, however, before fading away into nothingness again.

THE THIRD NIGHT

MARY J. HEASTER is once more praying for the dead Zona to return and finish the story. The girl comes back for a third time.

ZONA..... continues the tale of how a charming bride had met a violent end. But the harrowing details have to be told later, for the story-teller once more dissolves into nothingness.



WHERE ZONA SHUE WAS MURDERED

THE FOURTH NIGHT

MARY J. HEASTER has not yet given up her continual praying. After the prayer has gone on for a time, Zona appears to her for the last time.

ZONA..... finishes the whole chilling story of how she was murdered by her blacksmith husband of a few weeks. The girl spares no details, even describing the house in which the killing took place, a dwelling the mother had never seen. Zona is specific about the method used by the murderer. "He seized each side of my head with his hands, and by a sudden twist dislocated my neck."

Act one, scene 1, of HAMLET
Three Guards before the Castle

MARCELLUS-- Horatio says 'tis but our fantasy... this dreadful sight twice seen of us. I have entreated him... if this apparition come... he may speak to it.
HORATIO----- Well... sit down, and let us hear Bernardo speak of this.

ENTER GHOST

BERNARDO--- Like the king that's dead.
HORATIO----- What art thou? Speak!

EXIT GHOST

Act one, scene 2

HORATIO----- My lord, I think I saw him yesternight.
HAMLET----- Saw? Who?
HORATIO----- The king, your father.
HAMLET----- For God's sake, let me hear!

ENTER GHOST

Act One, scene 4

GHOST (to Hamlet) If thou didst thy father love, revenge his most foul and unnatural murder!





Among the things Zona told her mother--according to the testimony--was a complete description of the Shue residence and surroundings, a description of the place where the blood was found in the dining-room, and a wish that the mother search a certain spot behind a loose board in the cellar.

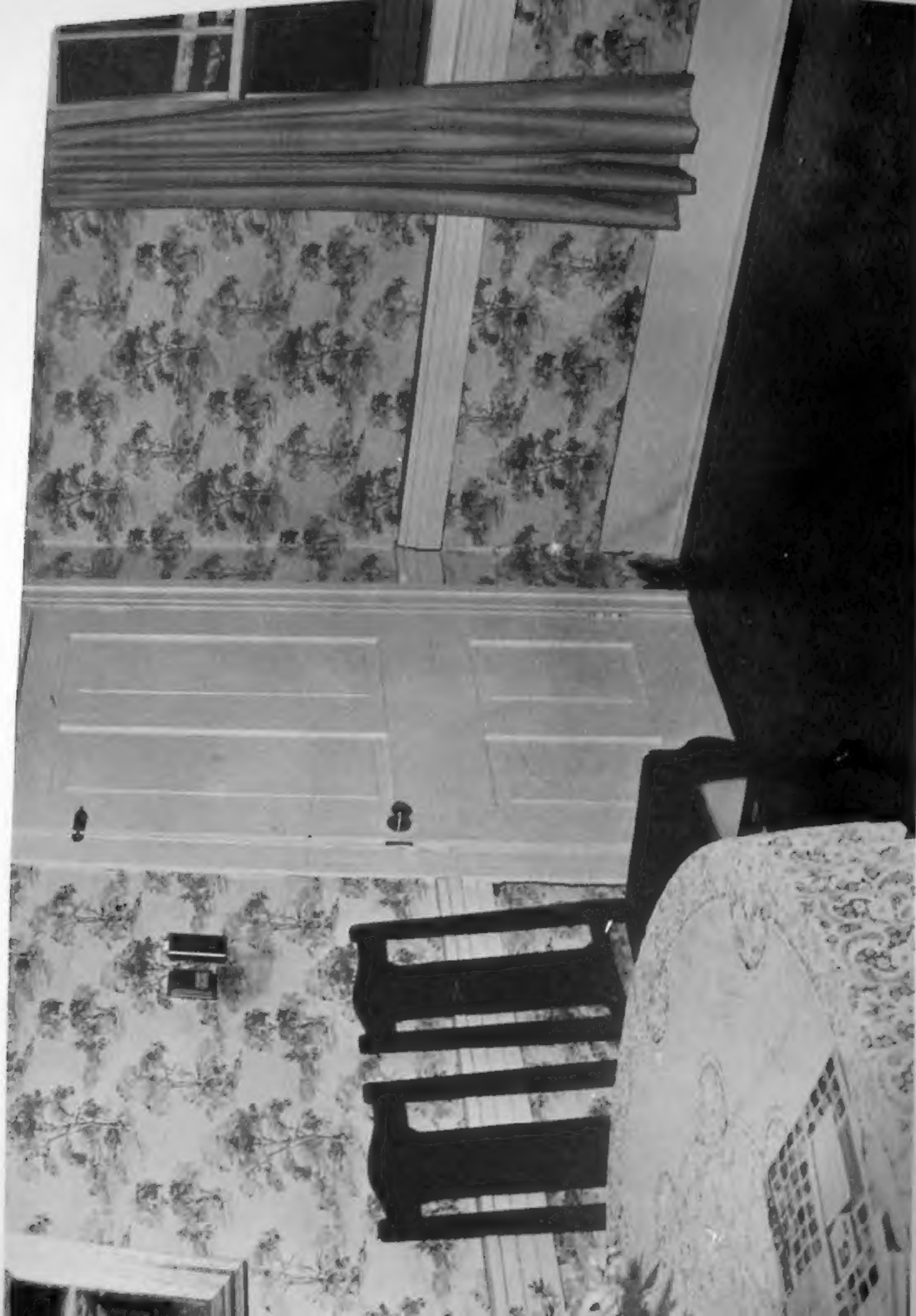
Most dramatic was Mary S. Heaster's testimony as to why the girl died and the manner of her death. It appeared that the blacksmith had come home from the shop that evening, seemingly in an angry mood. He berated Zona because she had not prepared meat for his supper. She replied that they had plenty of good things on the table, enough to make a fine meal.

Zona said, "He got up and started toward me..."

Nothing could shake the mother's story. The damning evidence kept piling up. In the end the jury believed that murder had been done. Edward S. Shue was convicted. He was sent to The West Virginia State Penitentiary, where he died eight years later.

Left homeless after the tragedy was Shue's pet dog, Perk, which was adopted by Mrs. Ellen Ocheltree, who lived in the Chesnut Flat area north of Lewisburg. Perk lived to an old age with his new owner.

Was a man convicted by a ghost? Was it a dream? Could it have been an hallucination caused by an overwrought mind? No one seems to be sure of the answer. Was a murder actually committed? A jury of Greenbrier County citizens said yes.



ZONA SHUE'S BODY WAS FOUND HERE

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B. Holt, L. J. Williams, D. R. Thomas
and John D. White. District Steward,
Judge J. M. McWhorter.

Foul Play Suspected.

Mrs. Zona (Heaster) Shue died in the
Richlands of this county, on the 23rd of
January, and her body was taken out
to Little Sewell and buried. Since then
rumors in the community caused the
authorities to suspect that she may not
have died from natural causes. In
short her husband, E. S., commonly
known as "Trout" Shue, was suspected
of having brought about her death by
violence or in some way unknown to her
friends. An inquest was accordingly
ordered, and, on Monday last before
Justice Homer McClung and a jury of
inquest, assisted by Mr. Preston, the
State's Attorney for the county, Mrs.
Shue's body was exhumed and a *post*
mortem examination made, conducted
by Drs. Knapp, Rupert and Houston
McClung, Shue being present and sum-
moned as a witness. From one of the
Doctors we learn that the examination
clearly disclosed the fact that Mrs.
Shue's neck had been broken. We hear
too that Shue's conduct at the time of
his wife's death and when she lay a
corpse in his house was very suspicious.

The jury found in accordance with
the facts above stated, charged Shue
with the crime of murder and yester-
day afternoon he was brought here by
James C. Shawver, John N. McClung
and Estill McClung and lodged in jail
to await the action of the grand jury.

Personal Mention.

Reg. R. L. Telford was in Charleston

half of 81, Railway avenue, and

From John Driscoll and
Massie and Dora K. Sexton
No. 27, on Poca avenue, Roanoke

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Hillsboro, Pocahontas Co.

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parents and little sister

enjoy the congratulations and benedictions extended to them. "PARSON."

A Tazewell, Va., lawyer, who was attending Court at Pearisburg, Giles county, at the time of the recent earthquake, thus describes the occurrence there, which seems to have been the center of the seismic disturbance:

“ Imagine the sharpest peal of thunder you ever heard nearest you, then increase this crash three-fold and you have some idea of the actual noise ; sharp, strong and appalling. It seemed that the rock strata under the old town was being crushed to powder by some mysterious agency, and the noise was as great as if it were all grinding. The earth rocked, the buildings trembled, and that daft or crazy feeling that seizes one when awful and uncontrollable dangers are about, caught every soul. The houses cracked and reeled ; the bricks flew from off the houses ; riding horses secured to the racks about broke loose and fled and neighed ; the dust arose from the rolling earth and trembling houses like the sweep from a broom ; men in maudlin craziness counselling coolness waltzed in each others arms ; others leaped fences and held their hands over their heads ; women screamed and fled with their little ones ; and children cried and ran around aimless and helpless.”

Pickups in Town and County.

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Greenbrier Independent.

THURSDAY, JUNE 17TH, 1897.

LOCAL MATTERS.

The Greenbrier Circuit Court will convene next Tuesday, the 22nd inst.

WANTED.—Summer boarders, by Mrs. John Shepherd, at the Bloomer "Tuscan" farm, near Lewisburg.

Constitution Independent.

THURSDAY, JULY 1ST, 1897.

LOCAL MATTERS.

S. W. Willey has been appointed postmaster at Minton, vice Geo. W. Warren, resigned.

MR. PERRY SMITH, formerly of Monroe county, died on the 19th, at his home in Bluefield, aged 80 years.

FOR SALE.—A good farm of 125 acres, well-watered, good fruit, in good condition, near Lewisburg.

expressed, he, perhaps, will never know, but we know it, and remember him with gratitude "by what he has done."

Athens, W. Va.

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The State vs. E. S. Shue.

The evidence in this case was concluded yesterday morning and the argument begun in the afternoon, after the instructions had been given to the jury by the Court.

There was no witness to the crime charged against Shue and the State rests its case for a conviction wholly on the circumstances connecting the accused with the murder charged.—The evidence of the medical experts, Dr. Knapp and others, who conducted the post mortem examination, makes it quite clear that Mrs. Shue did not commit suicide. The post mortem made it clear that her neck had been dislocated, but there was no mark upon her person or other evidence to show that she had subjected herself to any sort of violence. Her body was found by the negro boy, sent to the house by Shue, about 11 o'clock in the morning, and when Dr. Knapp reached the house, an hour or two later, it was quite cold

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State to show that Shue killed his wife by dislocating her neck by some means the evidence does not disclose ; that he was the only person seen about or known to have been at the house that morning prior to the time when his wife was found dead ; that he requested Dr. Knapp, after he had resorted to the usual means of resuscitation, to make no further examination of the body ; that he assisted in dressing the body and in doing so put around the neck a high collar and a large veil several times folded and tied in a large bow under the chin ; that the head was observed by a number of the witnesses to be very loose upon the neck and would drop from side to side when not supported ; that Shue sent the negro boy to the house to gather the eggs, instructing him to go into the house, find his wife and see if she wanted anything ; that in his conversation and conduct, after his wife's death, he seemed in good spirits, and showed no proper appreciation of the loss he had sustained ; that when summoned to the inquest and post mortem out at Sewell he said to various

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of the loss he had sustained; that when summoned to the inquest and post mortem out at Sewell he said to various witnesses that he knew he would come back under arrest; that in speaking to a number of witnesses on the subject he always said he knew that they could not prove that he did the killing, &c.—So the connection of the accused with the crime depends entirely upon the strength of the circumstantial evidence introduced by the State.

Shue was on the stand all Tuesday afternoon. He was given free rein and talked at great length; was very minute and particular in describing unimportant incidents; denied pretty much everything said by other witnesses; said the prosecution was all spite work; entered a positive denial of the charge against him; vehemently protested his innocence, calling God to witness; admitted that he had served a term in the pen; declared that he dearly loved his wife, and appealed to the jury to look into his face and then say if he was guilty. His testimony, manner, &c., made an unfavorable impression on the spectators.

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entered a positive denial of the charge against him; vehemently protested his innocence, calling God to witness; admitted that he had served a term in the pen; declared that he dearly loved his wife, and appealed to the jury to look into his face and then say if he was guilty. His testimony, manner, &c., made an unfavorable impression on the spectators.

There is no middle ground for the jury to take. The verdict inevitably and logically, must be for murder in the first degree or for an acquittal.

HON. C. B. BUSH, President of the Gümmer County (W. Va.) Court, says that he has had three cases of flux in his family during the past summer, which he cured in less than a week with Chamberlain's Colic, Cholera and Diarrhoea Remedy. Mr. Bush also states, that in some instances there were twenty hemorrhages a day.—*Glennville (W. Va.) Pathfinder*. This remedy has been used in nine epidemics of flux and one of cholera, with perfect success. It can always be depended upon for bowel complaint, even in its most severe



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